

VZCZCXRO7348  
OO RUEHPB  
DE RUEHSV #0543/01 3392343  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 052343Z DEC 06  
FM AMEMBASSY SUVA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3516  
INFO RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 1425  
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY IMMEDIATE 1018  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON IMMEDIATE 1207  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE  
RHHJJAA/JICPAC HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE  
RUEHNZ/AMCONSUL AUCKLAND PRIORITY 0235  
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY PRIORITY 0638

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 SUVA 000543

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/06/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [FJ](#)  
SUBJECT: FIJI UPDATE 12/6: BAINIMARAMA DISSOLVES  
PARLIAMENT, INTIMIDATES VIPS, AND THREATENS FORCE IF  
DISSENT REQUIRES IT

REF: A. SUVA 538 (AND PREVIOUS)

[1B.](#) SUVA 539

[1C.](#) STATE 195599

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

#### Summary

-----  
[11.](#) (C) Commodore Bainimarama swore in his caretaker Prime Minister of Fiji Wednesday late afternoon and then dissolved Parliament. He later announced new Commissioners of Police and Prisons. The RFMF moved VP Madraiwiwi out of his office today and convinced PM Qarase to relocate, for now, to his home in Fiji's Lau Islands. Cabinet members, including FM Tavola, are lying low, awaiting developments. In a media statement, Bainimarama acknowledged that some senior civil servants and the Great Council of Chiefs are not cooperating. He threatened that if dissension pushes the RFMF to use force, it will do so "very quickly." Bainimarama and the RFMF have endeavored to intimidate, at times quite crudely, public servants, the police, and the media. An effort by some to drum up a government of national unity looks unlikely to flower. In a lukewarm reaction, former PM and Fiji Labor Party (FLP) head Chaudhry has said he cannot condone Bainimarama's coup, but he understands the substantive frustrations that motivated it. End summary.

#### Bainimarama swears in caretaker PM

-----  
[12.](#) (C) Just before 5 p.m., RFMF Commander Bainimarama, acting in his self-appointed role as executive of Fiji, swore in Jone Baravilala Senilagakali as caretaker Prime Minister (see ref B). We found out a bit about Senilagakali from a long-time contact who is a close relative of the man. That source reports he is 76 years old. He is a medical doctor who, while semi-retired, serves as a manager for RFMF medical funds. Twenty or more years ago he was Permanent Secretary for Health and for Foreign Affairs, and also served at Fiji missions in Los Angeles and in Japan. He is described as "not a nationalist," and reportedly he has become close to Bainimarama, respecting his views on "moral issues." Senilagakali's family had no idea the appointment was coming. His wife and children were embarrassed.

#### CEOs not cooperating; interim government deferred

-----  
[13.](#) (U) In a short media statement after the swearing in, Bainimarama said that, on the advice of the caretaker PM, he has dissolved Parliament. Bainimarama announced the caretaker government he mentioned last night has been "put on

hold" because the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) has deferred its meeting, earlier scheduled for next week. Bainimarama said ministerial posts for the new government will be advertised and anyone can apply. He stressed the importance of the state continuing to function, then noted that a number of CEOs are "not cooperating."

RFMF removes VP from office

14. (C) We are told RFMF troops entered Vice President Madraiwiwi's office today and then escorted him to his official residence. Presumably the action was intended to illustrate Bainimarama's announcement last night that he had removed the current Government. It also surely exemplified Bainimarama's intense displeasure that the VP wrote the statement yesterday decrying the RFMF coup attempt and convinced President Iloilo to issue it (ref A), thereby frustrating the RFMF intention to argue that the President was an accomplice. We gather Iloilo, himself, has not been resettled, but his office and his home are both in Government House, and Bainimarama's statement last night indicated an intention to have the Great Council of Chiefs re-appoint the President (no mention of the VP) in a few weeks.

PM Qarase prodded to depart Suva

15. (C) Fiji PM Qarase flew from Suva's Nausori airport to his home island in eastern Fiji's Lau Group early this morning. We spoke with him around mid-day by phone and conveyed the U.S. statement (ref C). He appreciated the sentiments. Qarase said intelligence reports had indicated the RFMF was intending to forcibly remove him from his residence, put him on a Fiji Navy ship, and send him off to Lau. He instead made arrangements to fly. Qarase told us that, with multiple

SUVA 00000543 002 OF 004

phone lines in hand, he is keeping in contact with his team in Suva. They are discussing next steps. Qarase confirmed that he has not/not resigned as PM, and he said he intends to return to Suva as soon as is reasonable.

FM Tavola is lying low; RFMF hit list

16. (C) We spoke with Foreign Minister Tavola today to let him know of the U.S. statement. He expressed appreciation for the American views, but said Bainimarama, unfortunately, is "beyond logic. He doesn't see the full implications of his actions. It is sad." Tavola said the Cabinet has decided to "lie low" as the situation unfolds. He said the RFMF is known to have a "hit list" that includes Attorney General Bale, PM CEO Kotobalavu, and others. Tavola said Bale has shifted from his usual lodging. RFMF troops took Kotobalavu from his office to Queen Elizabeth Barracks (QEB) at mid-morning.

Bainimarama warns all: cooperate, or else...

17. (C) In today's media statement, Bainimarama said the "life of the state is threatened" by efforts to stir opposition, thus he must regretfully, under the doctrine of necessity, derogate from the Constitution's Bill of Rights and declare a state of emergency. He noted that Qarase has continued to make statements, as have Acting Police Commissioner Moses Driver, Solicitor General Nainendra Nand, Public Service Commission (PSC) Chairman Stuart Huggett, Elections Commission Chair Karavaki, and others. Bainimarama said such people "do not have the freedom to incite riots" and their comments "are not helping create a peaceful transition to a democratic government." He said all parties must cooperate. "There is no point in debating legalities, Qarase and his cronies are not coming back." If the RFMF is "pushed to use force, it will do so very quickly." He noted the possibility of a curfew. (Note: In a short chat with the Embassy DATT today, Bainimarama said he will impose a curfew beginning tonight.) The RFMF has distributed its Declaration of State of Emergency which announces several security measures under

Bainimarama's name: a two-tier security cordon around Suva; a notice that RFMF reserves will march into camps for the purpose of being deployed to support the RFMF's current efforts; and a grant to RFMF reserves of the right to enforce curfews.

#### Intimidating public servants

-----

¶8. (C) Bainimarama told the DATT he would not meet with ministry CEOs today. Still, RFMF troops reportedly broke up a meeting of CEOs with the PSC head Huggett and chief Government lawyer Nand this morning, and then, under protest, took the group to the RFMF Strategic Headquarters. Another source reports the group was forced to listen to a lecture on the military version of "doctrine of necessity." Huggett, head of the PSC, told a contact that someone from the RFMF threw him to the ground, then Bainimarama grabbed him by the ear and threatened: "don't f\*\*\* with the military." By late afternoon, CEOs were reportedly back in their offices, but without instructions from the RFMF.

#### Also attempting to intimidate police

-----

¶9. (C) RFMF troops forced Acting Police Commissioner Driver and the Deputy Commissioner for Crime to go to QEB around mid-day, breaking up a meeting of senior Police officers at the Police Tactical Response Unit (PTR) headquarters. The two were later released, and Driver told us he had met for only 30 seconds with Bainimarama who told him: "stop making statements." With the DATT, Bainimarama said he intends to "sack" Driver and appoint new blood at the top ASAP. In the media statement this afternoon, the Commodore announced he has appointed BrigGen Naivalurura, until recently head of RFMF forces in UNAMI in Iraq, as Commissioner of Prisons, and LtCol. (ret.) Jim Koroi as Police Commissioner. (Note: Naivalurura, a highly respected straight shooter, reportedly told Bainimarama he would not participate in a coup. The shift to Prisons removes a rival and potential dissident from the RFMF. Koroi is a close advisor to Bainimarama.)

and the media, too

-----

¶10. (C) Bainimarama told the DATT he didn't force closure of the Fiji Times and Fiji TV news last night. However, when

SUVA 00000543 003 OF 004

Qarase appeared on Fiji TV immediately after the coup speech (ref B), Bainimarama said, "I had to act." (Note: we are told RFMF troops visited both media organizations, along with several others, and insisted on overseeing news reporting. The two media organizations refused to comply, preferring to close.) The Fiji Sun tells us no RFMF troops visited them, so they went ahead and published today. They covered Bainimarama's speech but declined to run the President's statement of opposition. The editor told us The Sun couldn't get confirmation of authenticity from Government House. The Fiji Post, after closing down under reported RFMF threat two days ago (ref A), managed to publish a short edition this morning. It had significant news about Bainimarama's speech, the President's opposition, and continuing expressions of dismay from the public. The two biggest Fiji radio networks had RFMF visitors but continued to report the news, seemingly in full. The head of Fiji's Media Council spoke out publicly decrying RFMF efforts to censor free speech and press.

¶11. (U) We hear from media sources that, during the day, representatives of the media organizations met with RFMF Chief of Staff Teleni, who apologized for the RFMF interference. He said the troops would be removed, and they have been. Teleni tendered a request that "journalism be responsible and not incite violence." The media said they would abide by that.

#### Closing down Parliament

-----

¶12. (U) Reportedly, RFMF troops entered Parliament this

morning during the Senate's sitting and closed it down. The House concluded its fall sitting a couple of weeks ago, after passing the budget for 2007. We have heard the Senate rushed to pass the budget yesterday, worried about military intentions. Reportedly, the RFMF escorted Speaker of the House Nacuva (a former Ambassador to the U.S.) to QEB, joining the crowd there.

Gov't of National Unity?

-----  
¶13. (C) We hear that Opposition Leader Mick Beddoes, who has spoken clearly against the takeover, and Independent Minister Rob Irwin are attempting to negotiate a government of national unity (GNU), to be composed of parliamentarians, but with no Qarase ministers. The concept would have Qarase step down as PM. Not surprisingly, Qarase reportedly expressed reluctance. (Note: Some 23 of the 36 parliamentarians from Qarase's SDL party have been Ministers or State Ministers in the current government, including all those considered capable of ministerial assignments. The proposed GNU seemingly would be heavy with non-SDL members, obviously not very attractive to Qarase.) We doubt Bainimarama would find it particularly attractive either.

Former PM Chaudhry speaks

-----  
¶14. (U) Fiji Labor Party leader Chaudhry told the media last night that he will not serve in an interim government since Bainimarama's actions are obviously illegal. Chaudhry issued an FLP media release today calling for the restoration of democratic rule ASAP. Much of the release described in detail the faults of the Qarase Government; however, it concluded by saying: "Quite simply, we cannot condone coups as each coup sets the country back at least 20 years." Chaudhry said there is still time to salvage the situation, but it will require a genuine desire by those concerned to act in the best interest of the nation and its people.

Comment

-----  
¶15. (C) Somewhat surprisingly, Bainimarama in his media statement today acknowledged that senior civil servants, the GCC, and other malcontents, including Qarase, are frustrating his plans. Not surprisingly, Bainimarama is striving to undercut those efforts, including by threats of force. Bainimarama's reported mistreatment of PSC head Huggett is a disturbing insight into bullying instincts, as were the efforts to throttle the media and police. Qarase's mention that his team is discussing next steps and Bainimarama's mention of a curfew, etc., indicate impressions that the current calm in Suva might heat up a bit. That said, it appears Qarase and his followers accept they would lose if they were to create a major public disturbance that could give the RFMF an opportunity to justify a hard crack-down.

SUVA 00000543 004 OF 004

DINGER